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KANSAS BULLETIN NO. KS300-13-39

SUBJECT: LTP–Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program–Fiscal Year 2013 Working Lands for Wildlife Lesser Prairie-Chicken Initiative

Action required by: March 8, 2013 (Field Offices [FOs])
April 15, 2013

Action required by: March 15, 2013 (Area Offices [AOs])
April 30, 2013

Action required by: March 22, 2013 (State Office [SO])

Purpose: To provide guidance on administering the fiscal year (FY) 2013 Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) Lesser Prairie-Chicken Initiative (LPCI) available through the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP)

Expiration Date: September 30, 2014

Background

WLFW is an effort between the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) that leverages capabilities and resources, targets assistance where it is most needed, cooperatively engages state and local partners, and collaboratively works with agricultural producers, forest land managers, and Tribes. The NRCS and the USFWS initially selected eight at-risk species whose decline can be reversed given sufficient resources and landowner participation. The WLFW promotes voluntary, incentive-based conservation on private and Tribal lands.

The primary objectives of WLFW are to:

- Provide landowners with financial and technical assistance to help them improve their lands through wildlife habitat management and protection.
- Implement conservation practices that will help restore populations of declining wildlife species (candidate, federally listed endangered and threatened, or other at-risk wildlife species).
- Provide landowners with Endangered Species Act regulatory certainty and confidence that conservation investments they make on their lands today can help sustain their operations over the long term.

(more)

DIST: A, F, S, Volkman

Eligible Land Uses, Resource Concerns, and Conservation Practices

The eligible land uses, resource concerns, and conservation practices are available in Attachment 1.

Contracts developed under WLFW-LPC must include core conservation practice (CP) 645 (Upland Wildlife Habitat Management). Core CP 528 (Prescribed Grazing) must also be included in contracts where grazing occurs. Core CPs may be financially supported; otherwise, the core CPs shall be in the contract as non cost-share practices. Supporting CPs are eligible for WLFW-LPC financial assistance (FA) to the extent that they are needed to support the core CPs.

All WLFW applicants must agree to follow the conservation practice standards and treatment measures as described in the USFWS 2011 LPCI Conference Report in order to be eligible for screening and ranking (this report is online at http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb1044884.pdf).

Screening Criteria

Applications will be considered HIGH priority if more than 50 percent of the offered acreage is located within the LPC current range and is defined as "irreplaceable" or "limiting" per the Crucial Habitat Assessment Tool (CHAT).

Applications will be considered MEDIUM priority if more than 50 percent of the offered acreage either:

- (1) Is within the action area as defined by the conference report and classified as significant or higher per the CHAT, or
- (2) Has data indicating the presence of LPC use

All other applications outside of the above described "Screening Criteria" shall not be considered for funding through WLFW-LPC and are **INELIGIBLE**.

See Attachment 3 for the WLFW-LPC priority areas.

Program Contracts System (ProTracts) Ranking Tool

The ProTracts fund code for WLFW-LPC is LPCI.

National questions are consistent for all WHIP applications. Refer to Bulletin KS300-13-37 for additional information on national questions.

A copy of the state and local ranking questions is provided in Attachment 2.

NOTE: State issue question number one refers to active leks. Lek data provided in the Conservation Programs Geographic Information System

[GIS] Interface [CPGI] tool is for all known LPC leks, not necessarily all ACTIVE LPC leks. This data is provided to assist in answering LPCI state question number 1. Answering “yes” to this question will NOT be solely based on the CPGI data.

If a producer has identified an undocumented (not shown in GIS CPGI tool data) active lek on their operation, ranking points may be obtained if the active lek is confirmed by a Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) area biologist and a NRCS range conservationist.

Participants must be willing to share this information (documented in CPGI or undocumented) to receive points. Under a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request, certain parts of the NRCS case file can be released.

Technical Assistance

KDWPT area biologists will assist with LPC habitat assessments. Contract development, contract administration, contract reviews, and follow-up for WLFW contracts is the responsibility of NRCS.

Deadlines

Although applications for EQIP are accepted continuously, the FY 2013 application evaluation period cutoff date for WLFW-LPC applications has been set for February 15, 2013.

FOs will have conservation plans and application rankings completed by March 8, 2013.

AOs will ensure peer reviews of rankings have been completed by March 15, 2013.

The SO Programs Staff will make funding decisions by March 22, 2013.

All approved applications and documentation will be entered in electronic contracts (eContracts) by April 15, 2013.

Assistant state conservationists for field operations (ASTCs-FO) will ensure that all contracts have been obligated in ProTracts by April 30, 2013.

Contact. Forward all questions through established channels to Chad G. Volkman, Resource Conservationist, at (785) 823-4568, or chad.volkman@ks.usda.gov.

(Signed)

ERIC B. BANKS
State Conservationist

Attachments